Anna Mik, "Entry on: Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets (Harry Potter, 2) by J. K. Rowling", peer-reviewed by Elżbieta Olechowska and Susan Deacy. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2020). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1006. Entry version as of November 07, 2026.

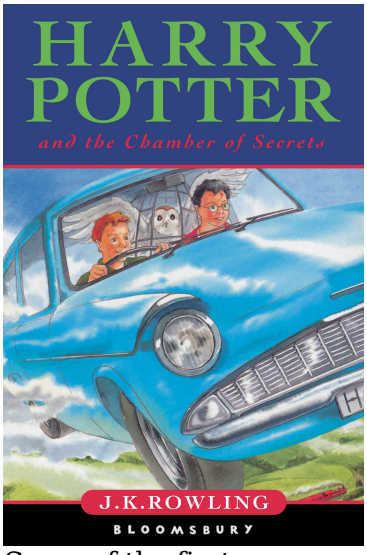
J. K. Rowling

Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets (Harry Potter, 2)

United Kingdom (1998)

TAGS: Basilisk Hades Persephone Phoenix (Bird)





Cover of the first edition. Courtesy of Bloomsbury Publishing.

General information	
Title of the work	Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets (Harry Potter, 2)
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1998
First Edition Details	J.K. Rowling. *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets.* London: Bloomsbury, 1998, 256 pp.
ISBN	1856136124
Awards	1998 – Children's Book of the Year British Book Award; 1998 – Nestlé Smarties Book Prize 1998 Gold Medal in the 9–11 years division; 1999 – Children's Book Award of Scottish Arts Council; 2000 – Best Book for Young Adults – American Library Association; 2001 – Whitaker's Platinum Book Award.
Genre	Fantasy fiction, School story*
Target Audience	Crossover (Children)
Author of the Entry	Anna Mik, University of Warsaw, anna.m.mik@gmail.com

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Creators



Portrait of J. K. Rowling, photographed by Daniel Ogren on April 5, 2010. The file is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike (accessed: May 25, 2018).

J. K. Rowling , b. 1965
(Author, Illustrator)

Joanne Kathleen Rowling, was born July 31, 1965 in Yate, Gloucestershire, England. She graduated from the University of Exeter with a degree in French and Classics, she is considered a writer with classical background. After publishing the first Harry Potter book in 1997, she gradually became the best known author of all time.

The Harry Potter septology (1997–2007), is one of the most successful and popular series in the history of children's literature (*Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* sold in 107 million copies). It may be argued that, from the very beginning, the author herself had to expand this world, fill the gaps, and explain all the rules– not only by discussing some issues (later on – mainly on Twitter) or giving guidelines in the interviews but by creating her website Pottermore. Once it was an online platform, where fans could read the series simultaneously with Rowling's commentary and additions. Now it serves more as commercial space, although Rowling still adds some new elements (e. g. the short history of magical schools in USA).

To give to the devoted fans of Harry something that would allow them to feel the magical bond with the world they want to be a part of she created three books that now exist in both the secondary world of Hogwarts and the primary world where the reader can have a copy in their own hands.

HP Series Spin-offs:

Quidditch Through the Ages by Kennilworthy Whisp (2001), *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* by Newton Scamander (2001) and *The Tales of Beedle the Bard* (2007)* are allegedly copies of books from the world of Harry Potter which include different literary genres and publication formats: history of sport, bestiaries, and collections of fairy tales. These books are not part of the septology, but they provide complementary information about sports, animals and animal-like creatures, and fairy-tales of the Wizarding World. Additionally, they can be interpreted as a device to help convince readers of the reality

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of the magical world. In these three books, as in the series sensu stricto, J. K. Rowling plays on various levels with great literary traditions, using one of the many features of postmodern literature.

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* Hand-written copies were released in 2007, printed ones in 2008.

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Additional information

Adaptations	Film: Dir. Chris Columbus, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, Warner Bros. Pictures, 2002. Video game based on the novel and the movie: *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, published by Electronic Arts, composer: Jeremy Soule, 2002.
Translation	Multiple languages
Sequels, Prequels and Spin-offs	First book: *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, 1997. Third book: *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, 1999.

Summary

The Chamber of Secrets is the second novel of the Harry Potter series. As in the first one, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, the story begins on Harry's birthday. Staying for the summer with his uncle and aunt – the Dursleys – the now twelve year old boy dreams of going back to Hogwarts School of Magic and Wizardry. His plans might change due to an unexpected visit.

One evening Harry finds a strange creature in his room – a house-elf named Dobby. Traditionally, house elves serve in houses of noble wizards and witches as slaves. Dobby comes from the Malfoy household, a magical family that despises Harry. The house-elf warns Harry not to go back to Hogwarts this year, as supposedly, it is not safe anymore. Unconvinced by the creature, Harry does not change his mind. Dobby takes the matters in his own hands and get the young wizard into trouble, which results in Harry getting trapped in his uncle and aunts' house.

Not much later, help arrives. Ron Weasley, Harry's best friend, and his brothers come to rescue Harry in their father's flying car. After escaping, they come to their family home, the Burrow. From there, the Weasleys and Harry go to Diagon Alley (shopping area for wizards and witches) to buy school supplies. There they meet Gilderoy Lockhart, a

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famous writer, magical celebrity and a new teacher of Dark Arts in Hogwarts. They also meet the Malfoys, who accuse the Weasleys and Potter of wasting their magical status and of a misplaced interest in despicable muggles (non-magical people). During this unpleasant encounter, Mr. Malfoy slips a mysterious book into the cauldron of Ginny, Ron Wesley's sister. It will become a crucial element later in the story.

At the school, Harry, Ron and Hermione attend regular classes and events. However, in the meantime strange things keep happening: students notice the lines of spiders escaping from the school, roosters at the school grounds are dying. Harry hears a voice in the walls of Hogwarts, and when he follows it, he encounters writing on the wall, written in blood: "The Chambers of Secrets has been opened. Enemies of the Heir, beware" (p. 106). Next to it, he also finds Mrs. Norris, the caretaker's cat, petrified. This event opens the discussion in Hogwarts: who is the attacker, who is the heir of Slytherin, and what is the Chamber of Secrets?

Over the course of the story characters find out that the Chamber of Secrets is a secret legendary location, hidden somewhere in the castle. It was built by Salazar Slytherin, one of the founders of Hogwarts, who was against letting muggle-born witches and wizards learn magic. Being the champion of magic reserved for poor blood wizards, he foresaw that his heir would come back one day to Hogwarts to fulfill his wish and eliminate all non-magical people from the school. What is more, the Chamber of Secrets is supposed to be not only the place of the heir hides, but also the home for a mysterious monster who helps to kill the unwelcome muggles.

One day, during duel practice with Lockhart (during which two students face off and practice magic), Harry and the other students discover something odd: Harry can speak with snakes. This fact connects him strongly not only to Slytherin (who also spoke parseltounge), but also to Lord Voldemort, a famous Slytherin and the most dangerous wizard, who killed many people, among them – Harry's parents. This way the connection between Harry and Voldemort gets stronger, as he now is a prime suspect for being Slytherin's heir.

Harry finds a diary which mysteriously appeared in the bathroom. When he starts to write in it, the ink sinks in, and someone introduces himself in a new sentence as "Tom Marvolo Riddle". Harry continuous

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the bizarre conversation and asks about the Chamber of Secrets. Tom answers that when he was a student, a muggle-born student died because of the monster's attack. However, the details are not accurate: Hagrid, Harry's friend, was expelled from Hogwarts, as allegedly, it was his "pet," who killed the girl.

Harry and Ron decide to find out the truth and go to Hagrid's hut (unfortunately, Hermione gets petrified while trying to find some information in the library). Hagrid is not eager to share and only advises the boys to follow the spiders. They do and find a family of giant spiders in the Forbidden Forest, with Aragog, Hagrid's former pet and now head of the family. He tells the story of how the Chamber of Secrets opened years ago and how Hagrid and himself were falsely blamed. Harry and Ron do not find out much except for one fact: spiders are scared of Slytherin's monster more than of anything else.

Another fact about the Chamber of Secrets is shortly revealed. While visiting Hermione in the hospital wing, they discover that their petrified friend holds a piece of paper in her hand: it is an entry on the Basilisk, a mythical giant snake that kills with its eyes. Next to the text, Hermione wrote one word: "pipes". That explains why Harry hears voices in the walls – he hears the Basilisk, preparing for the next murder. In the meantime, another event shakes the school: Ginny Weasley has been taken to the Chamber, where, according to another notice on the wall, she is about to die.

A hidden entrance in the bathroom leads Harry and Ron to the underground of the castle. In the Chamber, Harry meets a boy he knows from the diary – Tom. As it turns out, he is the young Tom Marvolo Riddle (which is an anagram of Lord Voldemort), who came back to Hogwarts as Slytherin's heir. Not in a full form yet, he draws his life energy from Ginny, laying on the ground, barely alive. As it turns out, she was the one behind the bloody writings and opening of the Chamber for the Basilisk. All of it was ordered by Tom, with whom she talked through the diary. In order to save her and prevent Voldemort from taking corporal form, Harry has to fight the Basilisk. With the help of Fawkes, Dumbledore's faithful Phoenix and friend, he defeats the monster and saves the school once more.

Analysis

As in the previous novel of the series, *The Chamber of Secrets* is built upon various motifs and cultural traditions. Classical antiquity plays a

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vital role in it, especially in two cases that I shall to discuss below.

The first case concerns the magical pets of two powerful wizards: Albus Dumbledore and Lord Voldemort. Fawkes, the Phoenix, whom Harry meets in the headmaster's office, comes to the boy's rescue when Harry is fighting the Basilisk in the Chamber of Secrets. Fawkes helps him, recognizing his loyalty to Dumbledore. The bond between the bird and its owner is magical. Just like in classical mythology, Fawkes has feathers of flaming colours and burns when old, to be reborn from its own ashes.

The second creature, the Basilisk, looks according to the ancient descriptions like a giant snake who kills with its gaze (Pilny the Elder, *Natural History*, 8.78; Hippocrates, *Epistolai*, 19). A creature of dark magic, it answers to the Dark Lord, who shares with Harry the rare ability to speak parseltongue, the language of snakes. In comparison to the Fawkes-Dumbledore relationship, which is based on positive values, the Basilisk-Voldemort much direct as it relies on their desire to kill. Another curious fact is that unlike Fawkes, the Basilisk does not have a name, which makes it less of a controlled animal, more like a tool in Voldemort's hands. At the same time the snake symbol also corresponds to some positive values of Slytherin House, which are (partially) based on ambition, cunning, leadership, and resourcefulness. The Basilisk in *The Chamber of Secrets* is as complex as the Phoenix. Being magical pets of powerful wizards, these two creatures should be possibly studied in comparison with one another.

The second case of the possible classical reception that I would like to highlight is the use of the motif of Persephone and her relationship with Hades. Some critics, like Holly Virginia Blackford*, see an echo of the myth in Ginny's and Tom's (Riddle/Voldemort) interactions*. However, the link appears tenuous, as Hades in love is an unlikely inspiration for Voldemort who wants to kill the girl and knows nothing about love, the main focus of the myth: love of Hades for Persephone and love of Demeter for her daughter.

The Chamber of Secrets is for Blackford a retelling of the Persephone and Hades myth, where Ginny, a young girl, represents the young goddess. She points to the motif of writing in a diary, which can be connected to *féminine écriture***, a concept discussed by the French feminist Hélène Cixous in her essay *The Laugh of the Medusa****. According to Blackford, Ginny would represent women's writing dominated by the writing of a man – again a rather, far-fetched

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interpretation. Ginny was not much of a writer, she was rather one side of a conversation through her writing. It is true that, like Persephone, she was kidnapped and put in a dark place, with not one but two men – Harry and Tom – trying to determine her fate for her, save her life, or kill her. The Chamber of Secrets being underground may be identified as Hades, but the meaning of Persephone's myth is far removed from the horror that the bewitched and periodically unconscious Ginny lives through. The question remains to what extent we can associate her story with classical mythology. It is a popular literary scheme (especially in gothic romance) to put a young girl under the power of male figure, as a motif it could be applied to the myth of Hades and Persephone but the story of Ginny and Tom bears no resemblance to any sort of romance. It is a kidnapping and an attempted murder.

* Holly Virginia Blackford, *The Myth of Persephone in Girl's Fantasy Literature*, London, New York, NY: Routledge, 2012, 181–198.

** Ibidem, 12.

*** Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa", *Signs* 1. 4 (1976): 39–54.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Basilisk Hades Persephone Phoenix (Bird)
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adolescence Animals Death Femininity Friendship Gender Girls Good vs evil Harry Potter Heroism Intertextuality Magic Magic powers Murder Past Relationships Sacrifice Values Witch
Further Reading	Blackford, Holly Virginia,*The Myth of Persephone in Girl's Fantasy Literature*, London, New York, NY: Routledge, 2012.

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